LINDA WHEELER—THE WASHINGTON POST

Death on Embassy Row: *Letelier's car*

Confession of a 'Good Soldier'

Pointing to Pinochet

It was Sept. 21, 1976. Orlando Letelier, a former Chilean ambassador to the United States and an outspoken critic of President Augusto Pinochet, drove down Washington's Embassy Row on his way to work at the Institute for Policy Studies. There was a flash of light underneath the car and a violent explosion—and suddenly Letelier and a young woman assistant were dead.

Were they, as FBI investigators have long suspected, victims of a hit team dispatched by Pinochet? That possibility was revived, though hardly confirmed, in a U.S. district court in Washington last week. Saying he was overwhelmed by guilt, a former captain in DINA, the Chilean secret police, Armando Fernández Larios, pleaded guilty to being an accessory after the fact in the car bombing. He said two of his superiors—Gen. Manuel Contreras Sepúlveda, the former chief of the Chilean secret police, and Col. Pedro Espinoza Bravo, a police operative—organized the assassination. And he said Pinochet had tried to persuade him not to testify.

Small role: By his own account, Fernández played only a small role. His assignment: to find out where Letelier lived and worked, to establish his patterns of movement—and then to keep silent about his mission. Two years after the assassination, he said, he was detained in a Chilean military hospital after telling authorities that he wanted to appear at a Washington extradition hearing following his indictment in the United States, "to clear my name." Later, he said, he was called to the Defense Ministry and found Pinochet awaiting him. "I'm told that you want to go to the United States," he quoted the president as saying. Fernández says he replied: "The truth is not that I want to go to the United States, but that I *am* going to the United States." According to Fernández's testimony, Pinochet advised him "to be a good soldier, to tough it out"—that if he did, "this problem will have a happy end."

AFP

Overwhelmed by guilt: *Fernández*

Fernández, now in the federal witness-protection program, faces up to 10 years in prison—a stiff sentence, considering that the man who in 1978 confessed to planting the bomb, an American-born Chilean DINA employee named Michael Townley, served only five years. The larger question is whether the Justice Department can get Contreras and Espinoza extradited. That seems unlikely. Both men are reputed to be intimates of Pinochet, and in 1979 Chilean courts dismissed out of hand a U.S. extradition request for them and Fernández.

The Chilean government's reaction last week was no less terse. Fernández's statement, a palace spokesman said, was being given "careful study," and the government was prepared to "lend all its cooperation in establishing the truth of the case, in accordance with Chilean law." Chilean law, however, is often Pinochet's law; with the latest allegations pointing at him, he will be in no hurry to cooperate.

MICHAEL MEYER *with* MARY HELEN SPOONER *in Santiago and bureau reports*

The Blowup Over the BBC

It's no good shouting at me in this hysterical fashion," Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher snapped in Parliament last week. A police raid on the Glasgow offices of the British Broadcasting Corp. had ignited one of the noisiest parliamentary confrontations yet in Thatcher's seven-year tenure, and she presented her side over catcalls and cries of "Fascist!" The government was not directly responsible for the police action, Thatcher insisted. But the material seized in the 27-hour search, she said, did present a threat to national security. "You are killing the rule of law in this country," Labor leader Neil Kinnock fulminated, and former Labor Minister Roy Jenkins accused her government of "acting like a second-rate police state."

Police in Glasgow had carted away two truckloads of reporters' notes, letters, tape recordings and more than 200 reels of videotape and film, virtually all relating to "Secret Society," a projected six-part BBC documentary. The first installment was to disclose the Defense Ministry's top-secret plans for Zircon, a $750 million spy satellite that Britain hoped to position over the Soviet Union. Free-lance journalist Duncan Campbell had researched the program, and when the BBC—under government pressure—canceled the Zircon episode three weeks ago, Campbell published his findings in the New Statesman. Already embarrassed by leaks from the intelligence establishment (NEWSWEEK, Dec. 15, 1986), the government clearly hoped the seized material would betray the identity of Campbell's Defense Ministry mole.

Leaders of Britain's news media and the opposition saw Thatcher's national-security claim as a bald attempt to turn the Official Secrets Act into a political weapon against investigative journalism. (The 1911 law makes it a crime to disclose any information that is judged not in the national interest.) Thatcher believes the BBC displays a left-wing bias—a charge the corporation denies. The rift dates at least to 1982, when evenhanded BBC coverage of the Falklands War angered Thatcher, who expected support from the government-funded broadcast service. Tensions have grown recently. Two days before the Glasgow raid, Alisdair Milne, the BBC's director-general, suddenly resigned at the request of its board of governors, almost all of them Thatcher appointees. The feud is sure to continue even under a new chief. Lamented one senior BBC executive: "It's an adversarial situation. The government's feeling is: if you aren't for me, you're against me."